

When the Doorbell Rings

The following parable comes from Doug Mendenhall:

*“Jesus called the other day to say he was passing through
And wondered if he could spend a day or two with us.*

I said, "Sure. Love to see you. When will you hit town?"

*I mean, it's Jesus, you know
And it's not every day [he drops by].*

*It's not like it's your in-laws
And you have to stop and decide whether the advantages
Outweigh you having to move to the sleeper sofa.*

*That's when Jesus told me
He was actually at a convenience store
Out by the interstate.*

*I must have gotten that Bambi-in-headlights look
Because my wife hissed
"What is it? What's wrong? Who is that?"*

*So I covered the receiver and told her
Jesus was going to arrive in eight minutes*

*And she ran out of the room
And started giving guidance to the kids—*

In that effective way that Marine drill instructors

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Give guidance to recruits

My mind was already racing

With what needed to be done in the next eight—

No seven—minutes

So Jesus wouldn't think we were degenerate loser slobs.”

Mendenhall goes on to describe

All the things he would have done

Had Jesus been actually planning to stop.

He finishes his story this way:

I plumped up sofa pillows

My wife tossed dishes into the sink

I scolded the kids

And she shooed the dog.

With one minute left I realized something important:

Getting ready for a visit from Jesus,

Is not an eight-minute job.

Then the doorbell rang.”

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With that in mind, we ask the question for today:

How does one get ready for a visit from Jesus?

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Today's parable is another of Jesus' parables
Relating to a wedding occasion.

Last week, we looked at the parable
Of the wedding feast.

Today we'll look at what is commonly known as
The parable of the ten virgins or bridesmaids.

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The Jewish wedding ceremony involves a couple of things
That Western-style weddings do not.

On the wedding day
The groom leaves his house
And goes to the house of the bride, fetches her
And together returns to his home.

When the wedding couple arrives at his home
The wedding festivities begin.

This is what is happening in our lesson today.

The ten bridesmaids are waiting for the return
Of both the groom and the bride.

And as most weddings go
Things don't go as planned

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And the wedding is delayed.

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In our traditional African wedding
Quite similar to the Jewish tradition

Judith told me not to bother picking her up
At her father's house.

She'd come with her entourage when she was ready.

She didn't want me waiting for her
Knowing she wouldn't be ready on time.

Well, either waiting for her at her father's house
Or waiting for her at my house
To me was all the same.

Waiting is definitely a part of a wedding ceremony.

So it's no surprise then
That the ten bridesmaids had to wait.

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They knew it would be dark
Before the groom would return with his bride.

And so they came prepared . . . sort of!

They all brought lamps
But not all brought extra oil

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In case it took longer even than they expected.

Five were prepared and five were not.

After a while, they tire of waiting
And soon all were asleep.

All of a sudden they awake to a cry
Declaring the arrival of the wedding party!

They go to trim their lamps.

The foolish ones realize they have used all their oil
And ask the wise ones to spare them some.

But the wise ones won't do it saying
There wouldn't be enough for any of them
And told them to go buy some.

And so the five foolish ones go to town to buy oil
And while they are gone
The bride and groom arrive.

The wise ones enter the wedding banquet.

And the door shuts.

The five foolish ones with newly purchased oil in hand
Return and knock on the door.

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The door remains closed

And the bridegroom replies

“I tell you the truth, I do not know you.”

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Like last week’s parable

Here is another one with an unhappy ending

Another parable describing the end times.

It goes without saying the bridegroom is Christ.

The wedding is his second coming.

The ten bridesmaids, both wise and foolish is the church.

Some say the oil is meant to symbolize “good works”

Letting the “Light of Christ” to shine.

Some say the bridesmaids’ sleep and rising

Symbolize death and resurrection.

Others say that’s putting too much into the allegory.

That the parable teaches one singly focused lesson

To be prepared for the second coming of Jesus.

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Along with the use of a wedding banquet to symbolize

The kingdom of heaven

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Jesus uses a door to symbolize entrance into eternal life.

A couple of other teachings of Jesus
Uses the imagery of a door.

Matthew 7:7-8 Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

Not so in the parable we just looked at, is it?

The difference?

The difference is that one concerns the present
And the other concerns the future.

One concerns the first arrival of Jesus
The other concerns the second.

One understands that God's grace is available
Always available
Always seeking, pursuing, loving, and saving.

The other, understand there'll come a day
When Jesus return as judge.

On that Day
There will be many who knock, and plead

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Like the foolish bridesmaids

Lord, lord, open the door for us (Mt 25:11 ESV).

And Jesus will answer,

Truly I say to you, I do not know you (Mt 25:12).

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There's another place where we hear the very same words.

Matthew 7:21-23 ²¹ Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who DOES the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name? ²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

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It's pretty clear that there is a connection here.

The parable of the ten bridesmaids

Is a lesson on being prepared for Christ's return.

Don Hagner says it this way:

"This parable makes yet once again, and in a most sobering way, the point that preparedness for the unexpected time of the coming of the Son of Man is of the utmost importance.

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That how one lives in the lengthening interim period between the first and second appearances of the Messiah must be consistent with one's claim to be a disciple."

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And so "how does one get ready for a visit by Jesus?"

Jesus himself answers this question,

Back in Matthew 7:24-27:

²⁴ Everyone then who hears these words of mine and DOES them will be like a wise man (note correlation between wise man here and the wise bridesmaids in our parable) **who built his house on the rock.** ²⁵ **And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.** ²⁶ **And everyone who hears these words of mine and DOES not do them will be like the foolish** (foolish bridesmaids) **man who built his house on the sand** ²⁷ **And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against the house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.**

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I don't know about you

But I have mixed feelings

Concerning the second coming of Christ.

You see, where do we find ourselves in the parable?

Do we really know who the wise

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And the foolish bridesmaids are?

We'd all like to think we are the wise ones

But in all seriousness, I can see myself in both!

But as our lesson is telling us

If we keep our lamps trimmed with the light of Christ

In other words, if we hear Christ's words

Believe them completely, and put them into practice.

If we clothe ourselves like last week's parable

With the fruits of the Spirit

**Love, joy, peace, patience,
Kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
Gentleness and self-control.**

We might look to the end times with hope

That Christ will come and judge

But as one who judges with grace and love.

From Frederick Buechner:

The New Testament proclaims that at some unforeseeable time in the future, God will ring down the final curtain on history, and there will come a Day on which all our days and all the judgments upon us and all our judgments upon each other will themselves be judged. The judge

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will be Christ. In other words, the one who judges us most finally will be the one who loves us most fully.

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There is another teaching Jesus uses
That includes a door.

Revelation 3:19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. ²⁰ Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

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So when the doorbell rings
And we go to the door and it's Jesus
It's probably too late to clean the house.

Let's pray our lamps are trimmed and filled with oil.